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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3127
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 001361

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STATE PASS USAID/W
USAID FOR DCHA SUDAN TEAM, AF/SP
NAIROBI FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA, USAID/REDSO, AND FAS

E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: DARFUR - SLA HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR'S ARREST

Summary and Comment

¶1. On May 20, the Minni Minawi faction of the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA) faction allegedly arrested former SLA humanitarian coordinator Sulayman Jamus for the second time since February 2006. Initial conflicting reports on his arrest and speculation on his current situation are a main topic of discussion in Darfur. The general sentiment is that this event could signify a setback with regards to the Zaghawa tribe's participation in Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) implementation and further complicate peace efforts. Despite the absence of Jamus, USAID's Darfur Field Office (DFO) has detected no observable change in humanitarian activities, travel, or programming. End Summary and Comment.

Overview

¶2. According to the U.N. Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS), Sulayman Jamus is from the Bedeyaat faction of the Zaghawa and was an Islamist close to Hassan Al Turabi before joining the SLA in 2003. He reportedly derives his power through his two nephews who are high-ranking officers in the Chadian Army and close to President Idriss Deby. Recently, Jamus has served as the main point of contact for U.N. and international non-governmental organization (NGOs) conducting humanitarian operations in SLA-controlled areas, notifying SLA field commanders of planned movements and facilitating the delivery of aid to populations in zones outside the control of the Government of Sudan. U.N. officials charged with coordinating humanitarian interventions in Darfur consider Sulayman Jamus to be an important interlocutor in reference to efforts to access SLA-dominated regions.

¶3. The SLA arrested Jamus in February 2006, after an apparent falling out between Sulayman Jamus and Minni Minawi. With a great deal of pressure from the international community, the SLA set him free. On May 20, the SLA Intelligence Chief and brother of Minni Minawi allegedly arrested Jamus northeast of Kutum for supposedly breaking internal SLA military rules. On May 22, the SLA-Minawi faction arrested 12 of Jamus' relatives and supporters who were reportedly tortured, according to one NGO visiting the area. The NGO reported that skirmishes between Jamus' and Minni's supporters on May 23 in Birmaza, North Darfur, left at least five people dead and an unknown number injured.

¶4. The NGO also reported that Birmaza is now under the control of the Group of 19 (G19) that supports Jamus. On June 4, UNDSS confirmed G19's control of Birmaza. [Note: Following the SLA Hashkanita conference in November 2005, 19 field commanders formed the G19 as an effort to distance themselves from the SLA-Minawi faction, as the group maintains that Minni Minawi is overly influenced by foreigners. While Sulayman Jamus had supported Minni Minawi, he was also a G19 sympathizer. End Note.]

¶5. A U.N. Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) human rights team has received permission from SLA-Minawi leadership to visit Jamus, but two attempts to travel to his location have been stalled by uncooperative SLA-Minawi field commanders. The UNMIS team will make a third attempt to visit Jamus on June 8.

SLA Motivations for Jamus' arrest

¶6. Observers fear that Jamus' arrest could signify a setback with regards to the Zaghawa tribe's participation in DPA implementation. The motivation for the arrest is unknown, but two theories exist. The first is that the SLA-Minawi leadership accuses Jamus of supporting the G19 and also campaigning against the DPA. The second version is that SLA-Minawi leadership is trying to weaken Jamus and promote other, more loyal fighters for positions such as SLA humanitarian coordinator.

Impact on Humanitarian Activities

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¶7. Previously, the established system of advance notification that required humanitarian organizations to inform the SLA of planned movements into SLA-controlled areas did not prevent harassment of relief workers and looting of property while in SLA-controlled territory. Despite giving prior notification and gaining assurances for safe passage, SLA fighters regularly stop NGO vehicles, often stealing the vehicles along with other equipment.

¶8. Since May 20, SLA notifications have been unclear and often hard to obtain, but the impact on humanitarian access has been undetectable to date. U.N. agencies and NGOs continue to travel to SLA-controlled areas to deliver assistance. International NGOs report that SLA checkpoints seem to be abandoned and that SLA soldiers have made no effort to stop humanitarian convoys traveling through SLA-controlled territory despite the breakdown in communication with the SLA's humanitarian coordinator. NGOs also report that SLA field commanders have been cordial and welcoming.

STEINFELD